

## 9th District

# 1997 Session Review

from Representatives  
Mark Schoesler and Larry Sheahan



Dear Neighbors,

The recently completed 1997 legislative session was historic and full of accomplishments. First of all, the Legislature completed the 105-day session on schedule. This is the first year since 1957 that lawmakers have finished a budget-writing session within its allotted time.

By the time we adjourned April 27, we had resolved many important issues. First, we passed a two-year operating budget that increases funding for K-12 and higher education while limiting state spending to its smallest increase in growth since 1971. We cut taxes by more than \$400 million. We also approved monumental legislation to reform the state's welfare and juvenile justice systems. And we passed several bills designed to improve K-12 and higher education.

Highlights of these and other issues are featured in this newsletter. Please take a few minutes to read it. If you have questions or comments about bills listed in this report, or other measures, please contact either one of us. We appreciate hearing your views.

Sincerely,

Rep. Mark Schoesler

Committees:

Agriculture and Ecology, vice chairman

Finance

Rules

Joint Administrative Rules

Review Committee, chairman

Rep. Larry Sheahan

Committees:

Appropriations

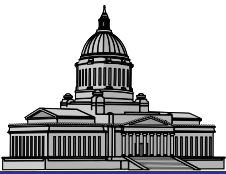
Higher Education

Law and Justice, chairman

## 1997-99 operating budget approved

After a compromise was reached with Gov. Gary Locke in the last weekend of the session, the Legislature approved a two-year \$19.073 billion operating budget, \$112 million below the limit set by Initiative 601. This budget represents a 7.7 percent increase over the previous biennium, which is the smallest biennial increase since 1971. The two-year spending plan leaves the state with a responsible reserve fund of \$362 million. Several important areas are funded by the budget. Here is a summary of how the budget will be spent:

**K-12 education:** The budget provides \$8.9 billion for our public schools — a 7.1 percent spending increase over the previous budget. This includes a 3 percent salary increase for teachers and other education employees; \$20 million for instruction materials, including books, classroom supplies and software (\$458 per average-size classroom); \$275,000 for expansion of student teacher centers; plus funding for vocational education and Readiness to Learn programs. Money also is provided for small school districts, such as those found in the 9<sup>th</sup> District. We are very pleased that such funding is included in the budget.



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**Higher education:** About \$2.2 billion will go toward our state's colleges and universities. This funding does not include money in the 1997-99 capital budget for construction and repair projects on our higher education campuses. The goal of greater access was addressed, as the budget provides an additional 6,390 enrollment slots, including 4,200 slots for our community and technical college system. Washington State University will receive 590 additional slots over the next two years, including 320 for the Pullman campus and 90 for the Spokane branch campus. There also is \$34 million provided for financial aid programs, including the State Need Grant, State Work Study and Educational Opportunity Grant programs. College faculty and staff will receive a 3 percent raise, and there is \$4 million in funding for the faculty retention pool, which will allow colleges and universities to keep their best faculty.

**Basic Health Plan:** The budget provides an additional 8,000 openings for the BHP, which provides subsidized health care for low-income families.

## Tax reductions achieved

The Legislature this year approved \$414 million in tax cuts — with relief aimed at property taxpayers, senior citizens and small businesses.

Legislators and Locke approved a one-year extension of the 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy that was enacted in 1995. However, when lawmakers tried to pass a comprehensive and long-term property tax relief and reform package, the governor chose to veto our proposal. As a result, the Legislature sent this package to the ballot as a referendum, allowing Washington voters to have the final say in November. Under the comprehensive package, the owner of a \$110,000 home would save about \$50 next year, as much as \$540 over the next five years, and up to \$23,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage.

The House and Senate voted overwhelmingly to complete the repeal of the business and occupation tax increase imposed in 1993. That tax hike targeted selected businesses, with increases of up to 66 percent placing a huge burden on many small

employers. After the governor vetoed our first bill that would have begun the repeal this year, he agreed to sign a similar measure that will begin implementation of the repeal in 1998.

Late in the session, lawmakers passed a bill to bar property taxes on business intangibles. SB 5286 later was signed into law. The exemptions include such things as trademarks, trade names, brand names, patents, copyrights, franchise agreements, trade secrets, noncompete agreements, customer lists and patient lists.

## Historic welfare reform measure signed into law

The Legislature passed a landmark bill that will reform the state's 60-year-old welfare system. This measure will emphasize personal responsibility and reward work. The jointly sponsored proposal, House-Senate Bill 3901, was signed into law by Locke after lengthy negotiations between his office and legislative leaders. The bill includes the following components:

**Time limits:** Welfare recipients will receive benefits up to 60 months in a lifetime. Extensions will apply for the disabled, extreme hardship cases or victims of domestic violence.

**Required work activities:** From the time they enter the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)



Rep. Schoesler gives a speech on welfare reform during floor debate.

program, all adult welfare recipients will be required to take part in the Washington Work First Program. They will first be required to search for a job. If they cannot find one, they will have to participate in subsidized or nonsubsidized work, on-the-job training, vocational education or community service.

**Child care:** TANF recipients and low-income wage earners will be able to receive child-care assistance. A \$10 co-pay will be required for most recipients.

**Increased earnings:** Recipients will be able to work more and keep more of their work-related income.

**License suspension:** The bill authorizes the suspension of any state-issued business, occupational, and driver's license that is held by a parent who is more than six months behind in his or her child support obligation and refuses to cooperate in a payment plan.

**Diverting people from welfare:** A program will be created to divert people from welfare. Low-income families will be able to receive cash assistance to meet short-term needs (food, clothing, automobile repairs and other employment-related needs) that would otherwise cause them to go on welfare. Assistance will be limited to \$1,500, and a family can receive diversion assistance only once in a 12-month period.

### Juvenile justice system to be revamped

On the last weekend of session, House and Senate lawmakers unanimously passed a measure that will reform the state's outdated and flawed juvenile justice system formed in 1977.

Prime-sponsored in the House by Rep. Sheahan, House-Senate Bill 3900 ensures that juvenile offenders will face some type of punishment for their crime, starting with the first offense.

Under the bill, 16- and 17-year-olds automatically will go to the adult court system if they are accused of drive-by shooting, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, and any



Rep. Sheahan, joined by Rep. Ida Ballasiotes (left) and Sen. Pam Roach (right) makes a point during a news conference on juvenile justice reform.

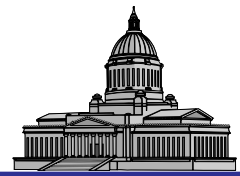
crime in which the offender was armed with a firearm. Currently, offenders ages 16 and 17 who commit murder and rape, or who are chronic and violent offenders, automatically are sent to the adult court system.

The bill replaces the old "point system" with a new, simplified sentencing system for juveniles. The new sentencing range will be based on the seriousness of the current offense and the number of felony and misdemeanor offenses.

The measure includes several alternatives to jail or prison time, including boot camps, home detention, community service and mandatory school attendance.

Other key parts include a requirement for parents to participate in court proceedings involving their children, and requirements to house those juvenile offenders sentenced to adult prison in a housing unit separate from adult inmates, and to provide an education program for offenders under 18 who haven't met high school or graduation equivalency diploma (GED) requirements.

Gov. Locke signed the bill into law.



**Here is a list of important bills, divided by issue, that were addressed by lawmakers. Most of these measures passed the Legislature and were sent to the governor.**

## K-12 education

HB 1581 - Will improve safety for students and teachers by making it easier to keep violent, disruptive students, gang members, and juvenile sex offenders out of schools. Signed by the governor.

HB 1841 - Signed by Locke, this measure will increase options for student discipline by 1) curbing the growing threat of gangs in schools by providing schools with additional discipline options for students involved in gang-related activities; 2) reducing the threat of violence in classrooms by allowing teachers to expel students from classrooms for engaging in substance abuse activities; and 3) alerting school administrators when enrolled students have been convicted of violent crimes.

HB 2042 - Under this reading bill, school districts will be required to choose a reading-skill evaluation test from a list provided by the superintendent of public instruction and to administer it to all second graders by the 1998-99 school year. Students not reading at grade level will be given extra help. It will establish a grant program to provide teachers professional development in teaching reading and to provide effective models for use statewide. Signed by the governor.

## Higher education

HB 1372 - Will establish a prepaid tuition payment program to help make higher education affordable and accessible to all Washingtonians. This program will allow family members to buy tuition units for their children or other relatives at today's prices. These units could be purchased in small quantities over the years before a youngster is ready for college. Signed into law.

SB 5927 - Will provide state colleges and universities with more tuition flexibility. Tuition will increase 4 percent per year during the 1997-99 biennium. The only exception will be at the University of Washington, where

tuition each year will increase 8.3 percent for nonresident undergraduate students, 7.3 percent for resident law school students, and 6.7 percent for nonresident law school students. Signed into law.

## Agriculture and water

HB 1016 - Prime-sponsored by Rep. Schoesler and signed into law, it allows the state to transfer about 1,000 acres of land to the Washington State University Dryland Research Unit near Lind. The land had been left to the state by an estate last year. The measure will help WSU's agricultural research efforts without costing taxpayers any money.



Rep. Schoesler listens to testimony during a House committee meeting.

SB 5514 - Will authorize fees for commodity commissions and the Department of Agriculture (DOA). The Dry Pea and Lentil Commission may raise its assessment from the current rate of 1 percent to 2 percent, although producers would have to approve the increase via referendum before the hike could go into effect. The Wheat Commission will be authorized to raise its assessment without seeking legislative approval. Wheat producers would have to approve a referendum to raise the assessment before it would go into effect. Signed into law.



## Rep. Mark Schoesler

SB 5175 - Would have lowered the business and occupation tax rate on selling cubed hay or alfalfa seed that is conditioned for use in planting from 0.484 percent to 0.011 percent. Lowering the B&O tax rate could give our hay producers and cubers a better playing field to compete with Canadian and Southwestern U.S. producers of cubes for the export market. The measure was partially vetoed. The bill was narrowed so that the lower B & O tax rate of 0.011 percent will apply only to cubed hay and alfalfa sold out of state and to conditioned seeds for agriculture.

SB 5077 - Will require all state agencies that have pest control responsibilities to follow the principles of integrated pest management, define IPM in statute, and create the Interagency Pest Management Coordinating Committee. Signed into law, it is a companion bill to one introduced by Schoesler.

HB 1033 - Prime-sponsored by Schoesler, it will revise requirements for grain facilities under the Washington Clean Air Act. Under the proposal, once a registration or report has been filed under the air pollution source registration program for a grain warehouse or grain elevator, a registration, report or fee will not again be required for the warehouse or elevator after Jan. 1, 1997, unless such a facility is expanded. The bill reduces unnecessary paperwork. Passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor.

HB 1110 - This water rights measure will provide relief from the Department of Ecology's current moratorium on further withdrawals from the Columbia and Snake rivers. The bill will impact those who have filed applications before September 1993 for new ground or surface water rights from the main stem of the Columbia upstream from where it and the Snake meet. The proposal also will void agency regulations that are in conflict with it. Signed into law.

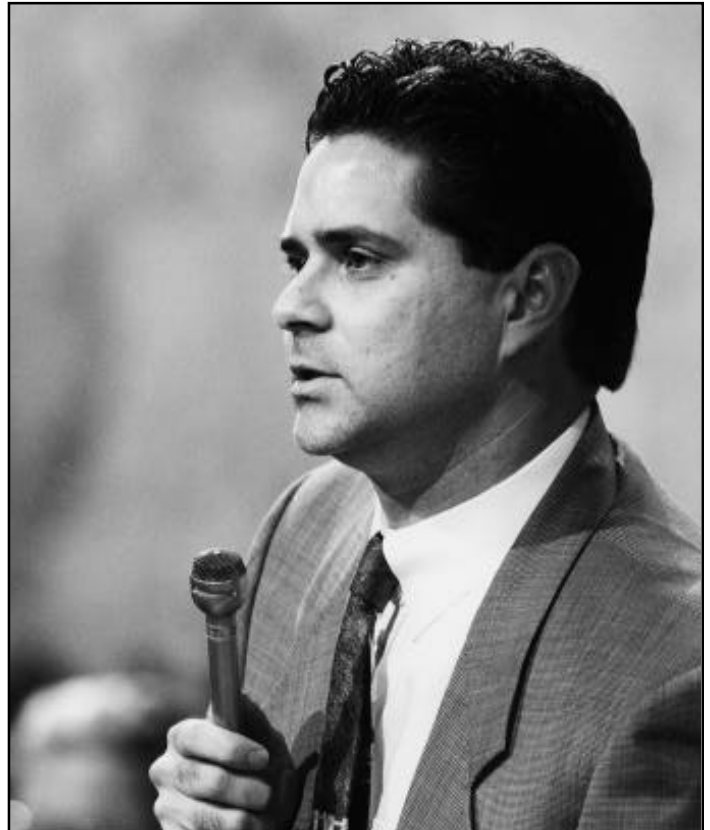
SB 5740 - Would provide assistance to rural distressed areas by establishing the Rural Area Marketing Plan (RAMP). The plan would have the following goals: promote the ongoing operation and expansion of businesses in rural communities, attract new businesses to rural communities, and promote the development of family-wage jobs. The measure calls for the use of tax incentives and rural enterprise zones to help rural communities. The bill also would direct the state Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development to emphasize business and economic development

## Rep. Larry Sheahan

services to rural communities. Approved by the Legislature but partially vetoed by the governor.

### Transportation

The Legislature passed a \$3.3 billion two-year transportation budget. The bare-bones budget does not include a gasoline tax increase as was proposed earlier this year. A majority of legislators were unwilling to support a gas tax hike without more assurances that revenue would be directed to highway projects. While the transportation budget provides money to continue and complete ongoing transportation projects, no funding was provided to begin new projects. The transportation budget includes a \$100 million transfer of motor vehicle excise tax revenue (\$50 million this year and \$50 million next year) from the general fund to help pay for road projects. The governor vetoed next year's \$50 million transfer.



Rep. Sheahan addresses the House during floor debate.

## Capital budget

The 1997-99 capital construction budget is \$1.884 billion. Emphasis is placed on maintenance and preservation projects. The major higher education institutions in the 9<sup>th</sup> District fared well in the budget. Washington State University will receive \$90.25 million over the next two years. This includes \$16.8 million for renovations to Bohler Gym, \$10.8 million for renovations at Thompson Hall, and nearly \$10.44 million for expansion and remodeling of Kimbrough Hall.

The budget earmarks \$22.48 million for Eastern Washington University. This includes \$4 million for infrastructure renovations, \$2.755 million for roof replacements, \$5.35 million for minor works preservation, and \$924,000 for expanding and remodeling Monroe Hall.

About \$1.7 million is provided for the design of a new health sciences building at Riverpoint Higher Education Park, a joint-centered campus in Spokane that would allow graduate students to take courses offered by Spokane Falls Community College, WSU, EWU, Whitworth College and Gonzaga University. For instance, a Gonzaga graduate could take a post-graduate course through Eastern at Riverpoint, and vice versa. It's an innovative idea that shows a lot of promise.

## Law and justice

HB 1176 - Signed by the governor, it will add certain sex offenses committed against children to the "two strikes" provision of a bill passed last year that increased sentences for sex offenders. HB 1176 adds first- and second-degree rape of a child to the list of crimes that qualify as strikes.

SB 5191 - Would have added to the list of crimes that qualify as a strike under the state's Three Strikes You're Out law the manufacture, delivery or possession with intent to deliver methamphetamine, also known as meth or speed. However, Locke vetoed this section of the measure.

## Reforming state regulations

HB 1032 - This regulatory reform measure focuses on the problems of rules which already are in existence. It also would reinstate some of the provisions of last year's regulatory reform bill that were vetoed by then-Gov. Lowry. HB 1032 would require state agencies to review all existing state rules and regulations and tighten the process for adopting new rules. All existing rules and regulations would have to be reviewed in the next seven years, and those that are duplicative, unnecessary or outdated would be eliminated. Partially vetoed by the governor.

### • Call us if you need help •

One of our jobs as your state representatives is to help you when you have a problem with state government. If you need assistance in dealing with a state agency, please contact one of us.

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